

TEXAS STATE OPERA THEATRE PRESENTS

# ERXES

BY GEORGE FREDERIC HANDEL

March 24-26 7:30pm

March 27 2:00pm

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Texas State University is a tobacco-free campus.

# Patti Strickel Harrison Theater

405 Moon Street

San Marcos, TX 78666

March 24-27, 2022

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*The rising STAR of Texas*

## **DIRECTOR'S NOTE**

*Xerxes* starts with one of the most famous arias of all time, “Ombra mai fu”. The main character Xerxes (Serse in Italian) is admiring the shade of a plane tree. Yes, it is plane and not plain. Think Platens Orientalis, Old World Sycamore, or Oriental Plane. Is there a more curious way to start a theatrical production than to talk about shade? Isn’t it incredibly confusing to introduce this otherwise turbulent character in such a peaceful way? We might expect that the tree is a symbol, but in that case we would expect it to come back at other times throughout the opera. (Spoiler alert - It doesn’t!) Maybe we could chalk it up to Handel having a gorgeous aria he didn’t otherwise have a place for. However, that isn’t particularly useful for the performer or production team though. This riddle is one we have been unraveling over the course of our rehearsal process.

In its original form, *Xerxes* drew on people and stories from ancient history. We purposefully deviated from that connection to focus more on the relationships between people and the exciting plot turns. Consequently, this production is set in a time that could be thousands of years in the past or future and lives in a more abstract spectacle-oriented aesthetic to allow greater focus on symbolism and imagination and less on literal representations of a specific time period. You will see chorus members go from being tree spirits in one scene, to members of the king’s court in the next scene, to representations of jealous emotions in another scene, and more. You will watch the set evolve and transform over the course of the evening. I encourage you to enjoy and let yourself experience this show with a mindset that is curious and full of questions. We found tremendous value in ferreting out the questions this opera poses and its possible solutions. We hope you do too!

# CAST

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Serse.....Anai Winn Quezada\*, Hunter Sabin^  
Arsamene.....Madison Jackson, Gentry Wessman>  
Amastre.....Kamryn Wheeler\*, Finley Hagen^  
Romilda.....Kathryn Brode\*, Christine Ashbaugh^  
Atalanta.....Rhiannon O'Brien\*, Brittney McKinney^  
Ariodate.....JP Moore  
Elviro.....Christian Mathews\*, Zachary Nelson^  
Chorus.....Carlee Abschneider  
Ayden Crocker  
Lucinda Ealey  
Jayda Ennis  
Adam Funderberg  
Seth Jones  
Ashlyn Killian  
Zachary Nelson  
Noah Ricciardelli  
Paiton Seals  
Brissa Trondle  
Gentry Wessman

\* Performs Thursday and Saturday  
^ Performs Friday and Sunday  
> Covering the role

# SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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Flute	Violin II	Bass
Maryssa Chartier*	Emmit Ghourley*	Morgan Milner*
Jessica Ajucum	Vastian Sitler	
	Joshua Garcia	Continuo
Oboe	Allyson Tavera	Kelsey Sexton
Bobby Harris*		
Korriagan Korthauer		
Bassoon	Viola	Harpsichord
Lilian Vo*	Tiana Mortiz*	Michael Leavitt
	Matthew Velasquez	
Violin I	Madeline Porter	**Denotes Concert Master
Kailey Johnson**	Carolyn Stennis	* Denotes Principal
Cristal Martinez-Perez		
Iana Baez	Cello	
	Alisson Pasao*	
	Nadia Diaz de Leon	

## ARTISTIC TEAM

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Jacob Harrison: Director of Texas State Symphony Orchestra  
Marc Reynolds: Director of Texas State Opera Theater  
Michael Leavitt: Music Director of Texas State Opera Theater  
Myra Vassian: Recitative Coach  
Anne McMeeking: Scenic Designer  
Hunter Sabin: Makeup Design  
Scott Vandenberg: Lighting Designer  
Vanessa Vega: Costume Designer & Graduate Opera Assistant

## VOICE AREA FACULTY

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Ron Ulen: Voice Area Coordinator & Professor of Voice  
Daveda Karanas: Assistant Professor of Voice  
Richard Novak: Assistant Professor of Voice  
Suzanne Ramo: Assistant Professor of Voice  
Tim O'Brien: Lecturer of Voice  
Cheryl Parrish: Senior Lecturer of Voice  
Myra Vassian: Senior Lecturer of Voice

# PRODUCTION TEAM

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Gabby Carney: Production Stage Manager  
Erika Kellogg: Assistant Stage Manager  
Eric Thompson: Rehearsal Pianist  
Toni Torres: Assistant Director  
Candice Mongellow: Performing Arts Center Operations Manager  
Robert Styers: Box Office Manager  
Nick Swanson: Audio/Video Lighting Supervisor  
Jordan Armstrong: Lighting Programmer & Operator  
Sabrina Beran: A/V Programmer  
Grant Wendt: Deck Chief & Fly Rail  
Kathryn Brode: Graduate Voice Assistant, Supertitle Creator  
Katelyn Segarra: Supertitle Operator  
Alisa Pock: Production Assistant  
Evan McClain: Backstage Technician  
Jai Auzenne: Backstage Technician Substitute

## SYNOPSIS

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**Setting :** New Persia in the distant future

### Act I

The king of New Persia, Serse (Xerxes), relishes a rare moment of peace and beauty in the shade of a Plane tree in the garden of a countryside summerhouse. As he admires the tree, his brother Arsamene and his brother's servant Elviro arrive to visit Romilda, Arsamene's secret love. They hear her singing from the summerhouse. She mocks Serse's infatuation with the tree. Serse hears his name as she sings. Arsamene decides to reveal himself to Serse who asks him about the mysterious singer. Enamored of her voice, Serse decides he wants Romilda for himself. Horrified, Arsamene tries to dissuade Serse, but to no effect.

Arsamene alerts Romilda of Serse's schemes. Romilda's sister Atalanta sees the opportunity to secure Arsamene, in whom she is secretly in love. Romilda tries to convince Arsamene that she will be true to him but he is doubtful of her ability to resist the king's demands. Serse tells Romilda that he wants her as his lover. Queen Arsamene reveals his love and tries to stop the king, but is banished from the court for his intervention. Serse unsuccessfully tries to woo Romilda.

Outside the palace in the courtyard Amastre, the queen already promised to Serse arrives in disguise. General Ariodate, father of Romilda and Atalanta, returns with Serse's victorious army. Serse congratulates Ariodate and promises that his daughter, Romilda, shall have a husband, 'equal in status to Serse'. Ariodate is delighted. Amastre is enraged at what she hears, causing her to nearly ruin her disguise.

The banished Arsamene commands Elviro to deliver a letter to Romilda that declares his love and intention to secretly visit. Amastre resolves to have her revenge on Serse. Atalanta taunts her sister, lying to her that Arsamene secretly loves someone else. Romilda doesn't fall for the ruse. Atalanta resolves to use all her wiles to secure Arsamene for herself.

## INTERMISSION

### Act II

Elviro has disguised himself as a flower-seller to convey the letter to Romilda, but is concerned that she will soon be Serse's wife. In a public square Amastre overhears and questions Elviro about the king's upcoming marriage. She realizes in despair that her last hope is gone. Atalanta arrives and Elviro makes himself known to her and explains his mission; she promises to deliver the letter and takes it from him, telling Elviro that Romilda has forgotten Arsamene and is in love with Serse. Later, Atalanta shows the letter to Serse claiming that it is addressed to her, and that Arsamene's love for Romilda was false. The news gives Serse hope and he takes the letter to Romilda, telling her that Arsamene loves her sister. She insists that she still loves him, though once alone, she falls prey to jealousy.

Amastre has decided to kill herself. Elviro stops her and she determines to confront Serse with his treachery before she dies. Elviro tells his master that Romilda is in love with the king; Arsamene is heart-broken.

Serse consoles the doleful Arsamene with the news that he shall have the wife he wants – Atalanta; Serse will marry Romilda. Arsamene, confused, insists that it is Romilda he loves; and that he is determined to win her. Serse advises Atalanta to forget her love for Arsamene, but she admits that she cannot. Elviro, searching for his master on the sea shore, watches as a storm brews.

In a garden near the city, Serse and Amastre, each lost in thought, lament the miseries of jealousy. When Serse attempts, again, to persuade Romilda to marry him, Amastre intervenes with drawn sword. Serse calls his guards, but Romilda dismisses them and asks Amastre why she leapt to her defense. Amastre explains that she was saving Romilda from being forced into a match against her will. Romilda pays glowing tribute to those true in love.

### Act III

In a gallery, Arsamene and Romilda are quarreling over the letter, but are quickly reconciled when Atalanta explains her deceit. Atalanta resigns herself to finding a lover elsewhere. Serse approaches and Arsamene hides. With veiled threats Serse now presses Romilda to accept him, and in desperation she agrees but only if her father will grant his consent to their marriage. Serse leaves to speak to Ariodate; Arsamene, emerging from hiding, bitterly accuses Romilda of betraying him.

Serse repeats to Ariodate his promise that a "man his own equal in rank shall be Romilda's husband". Ariodate, highly honored, imagines Serse to mean Arsamene and readily agrees. In the great temple of the sun Ariodate greets Romilda and Arsamene – still bickering – with the astonishing news that they are to be married immediately by Serse's decree. Ariodate joins their hands in marriage, then hurries back to Serse to thank him.

When Serse understands what has happened he turns on the quaking Ariodate in fury. A page now brings the letter, apparently from Romilda, accusing Serse of treachery; learning that it is from Amastre, he explodes with rage and rushes from the room to be met by Romilda, Arsamene, and Amastre. Serse orders Arsamene to kill Romilda, but Amastre intervenes and takes Serse's sword; if a traitor in love is to be punished, she will carry out the punishment. She turns the sword on Serse, and reveals her identity. Serse is humbled, and they are reconciled. Serse blesses the union of Romilda and Arsamene and begs forgiveness for his tyrannical behavior.

# SPECIAL THANKS

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Thank you to **Peggy Bruner** for her consistent support of our opera students.

Thank you to **Cheryl Parrish** who suggested that Handel's Xerxes would be the perfect showcase of our students this semester.

Opera is a team sport! Thank you to our dean **John Fleming, Joey Martin**, and the host of administrators and colleagues whose support has made this opera a success.

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